



ILLINOIS HOLOCAUST MUSEUM  
& EDUCATION CENTER

# STORIES OF SURVIVAL

## Lesson Plan & Activities for Students

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Visit the [landing page](#) for *Stories of Survival. Object. Image. Memory*, an exhibition curated by the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center and photographer Jim Lommasson. Have students read the brief introduction to the exhibition and watch the short video below to learn more about what the exhibition is and how it came to be. The objects in this exhibition reflect the lives of their one-time owners: childhood, home, culture, and religious practice, but also the impact of war, trauma, displacement, exile, and migration.

### [Where do these stories come from?](#)

Brief descriptions below, but for those who want to go more in depth, please read the attached links.

#### [The Holocaust](#)

The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately 6 million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators.

By 1945, the Nazis had murdered two out of every three European Jews. Millions of non-Jews were also targeted because of their perceived “racial inferiority” or political views or behaviors, including Roma (Gypsies), people with physical and cognitive disabilities, some Slavic peoples (Poles, Russians, and others), Communists, Socialists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and homosexuals.

#### [Armenia](#)

The Armenian Genocide was the murder of 1.5 million Armenians by Ottoman authorities through mass killing, forced deportation, and starvation in an effort to solidify Muslim Turkish dominance in the regions of eastern and central Anatolia by eliminating all Armenian Christians.

The peak of the atrocities came under the cover of World War I, between 1915 and 1918. The genocide was carried out by military and irregular forces under the command of senior Ottoman political and military leaders.

### [Cambodia](#)

Between 1975 and 1979, under the Khmer Rouge regime, an estimated 1.7 million Cambodians, one quarter of the population, perished. The regime enacted a program of harsh internment and torture and subjected many Cambodians to inhumane living conditions, starvation, forced labor, forced marriages, and execution.

Mass execution and burial in unmarked mass graves became so widespread that these areas in the country became known as the Killing Fields.

### [Rwanda](#)

Within 100 days, from April to July 1994, militia forces led by the Hutu-majority government in Rwanda, a country in Central Africa, murdered an estimated 800,000 to 1 million ethnic Tutsis and politically moderate Hutus. The Genocide, intricately planned by government-supported and -equipped Hutu leaders, finally ended when the Tutsi-dominated rebel movement, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), captured Kigali, overthrowing the Hutu government and seizing power.

### [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)

The collapse of the Yugoslav Federation had the deadliest effect on the republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia). Bosnia had a population comprised of Bosnian Muslims (43%), Bosnian Serbs (33%), Bosnian Croats (17%) and other nationalities (7%). As the Federation fell apart, Bosnian Serbs, with the support of Serbia, declared the territories under their control to be a Serb republic. Bosnian Croats soon followed, declaring their own republic with the backing of Croatia. The conflict turned into a bloody, three-sided fight.

From 1992 to 1995, it is estimated that more than 100,000 people were killed, 80% of whom were Bosnian Muslims, and 2 million people were forced to flee their homes. Concentration camps were set up; thousands of Bosnian women were systematically raped. In an act of genocide, more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were executed by Bosnian Serbs in the town of Srebrenica, a UN-declared safe area. It was the largest massacre in Europe since the Holocaust.

### [South Sudan](#)

From 1983-2005, Sudan fought a bloody civil war leading to nearly 2 million deaths. The government of Sudan, based in the north, applied Islamic law throughout the country in 1983, even in areas with large non-Muslim populations. The government also revoked the south's ability to self-govern. Fighting lasted over two decades, with civilians in the south being targeted for destruction of homes, crops, livestock, and murder through bombings, attacks on villages, and forced starvation. In 2011, southern Sudan voted overwhelmingly to secede from Sudan, forming a sovereign South Sudan, but violence still continues in the newly independent country.

### [Iraq and Syria](#)

After the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the collapse of the Saddam Hussein regime, sectarian conflict erupted between Iraqi Sunni and Shia Muslims. In the wake of extreme violence, four million Iraqis fled their homes, almost half of whom left Iraq. As of 2007, 1.2 million Iraqis settled in Syria as refugees to find safety. In 2011, during a period of uprisings throughout the Arab world, President Bashar Assad brutally responded to anti-government protests in Syria, leading to the ongoing civil war. Since then, over 470,000 people have been killed in Syria and over 11 million refugees have fled their homes, including Iraqis who originally sought refuge in Syria.

Caught in the turmoil of unrest in Iraq and Syria, in August 2014, the Islamic State, a terrorist Muslim group, attacked the Mount Sinjar region of Iraq, home to the Yazidi community, an ancient religious group. With the goal of eradicating the Yazidis, the Islamic State occupied the region, killing and kidnapping Yazidis who could not flee. Those fleeing were trapped on top of Mount Sinjar without food or water for days, until aid and escape could be provided by U.S. and Kurdish forces. Over 2.5% of the Yazidi population were killed or kidnapped and subsequently tortured and enslaved; many remain missing today.